

WILLIS STANLEY BLATCHLEY (1859-1940)

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The passing of Willis Stanley Blatchley must cause Entomologists, especially students of the Coleoptera of the United States, to pause and pay homage to the memory of one of the most distinguished of their ranks.

Willis S. Blatchley was born in North Madison, Connecticut on October 6, 1859, and passed away at his home in Indianapolis, Indiana on May 28, 1940. His parents moved to Indiana in 1860, and this became the home state of our noted Naturalist. Blatchley attended the grade school of Putnam County, and in 1879 began teaching, at which he spent his winter months until 1883 when he entered the University of Indiana as a student of Drs. David Starr Jordan and John C. Branner. He graduated in 1887 with an A. B. degree, writing a thesis on "The Flora of Monroe County, Indiana." In June 1891, he received an A. M. degree, his thesis this time dealt with "The Butterflies of Indiana." Thirty years later, 1921, his Alma Mater conferred upon him the degree of Doctor of Laws (LL.D.).

In 1894 he was elected on the Republican ticket to the office of State Geologist of Indiana, which office he successfully held for sixteen years.

Dr. Blatchley was the author of 246 scientific papers and books. The first of his papers "On the American Species of the Genus *Umbra*." was published in 1885 in the Proceedings of the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia, while his last paper, "Blatchleyana II." was published privately in 1939. The following books—*Coleoptera of Indiana*, 1910, pp. 1-1386, figs. 1-595; *Rhynchophora or Weevils of Northeastern America*, 1916, pp. 1-682, figs. 1-155 (Co-author with Chas. Leng); *The Orthoptera of Northeastern America*, 1920, pp. 1-784, pls. I-VII, figs. 1-246; *The Indiana Weed Book*, 1912, pp. 1-192, figs. 1-139; *Heteroptera or True Bugs of Eastern North America*, 1926, pp. 1-1116, pls. I-XII, fig. 1-215; *The Fishes of Indiana*,

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1938, pp. 1-121, fig. 1-39; and *Blatchleyana* I and II, all of which contain more than 4404 pages and 1395 figures will long serve as indispensable handbooks for the areas covered.

Not only was Dr. Blatchley a prolific writer and compiler of information concerning already described species, but he also described 14 new genera of insects, 11 Coleoptera and 3 Heteroptera; 470 species of insects—of which 224 are Coleoptera; 131 Rhynchophora (weevils); 66 Heteroptera and 29 Orthoptera. In 1935 he deposited his entire collection of mounted specimens along with copies of all his books and papers in the cabinets of the Department of Entomology at Purdue University, Lafayette, Indiana. Included in this collection were 470 holotype specimens of new species of insects which he had described.

On July 12, 1928, I visited Dr. Blatchley at his home on 1530 Park Avenue, Indianapolis, Indiana. After seeing his collections, especially the weevils, I obtained from him several specimens including two paratypes of *Blapstinus aciculus* Blatchley. Following this visit, I carried on an interesting correspondence with him. In 1930, I purchased 300 species of weevils from him. These were in capsules and consisted of from 4 to 10 specimens each. Again in 1939, I purchased 83 cuts which were used mainly in his Rhynchophora book. My last letter from Dr. Blatchley, in his own handwriting, came to me from Dunedin, Florida under date of January 4, 1940. Dr. Blatchley had spent his winters in Florida since 1911. I quote the following from this letter:

“Dear Dr. Tanner:

“I came down here, where I have a winter home, on December 3. I had a sorrowful Christmas as my only brother died in a hospital at Greencastle, Indiana on December 22d. He was 67 years of age and had lived on the farm where he was born all his life. He never married but lived with a sister also unmarried. I saw him last on October 6, my 80th birthday, when he and I went fishing together, as we often did in Walnut Creek.

“Did you receive a copy of my “Blatchleyana II-1940—an addenda to my Blatchleyana 1930—sent you some years ago? I ordered one sent to you some time in October.

“Dr. J. C. Bradley, who is getting out a large textbook on the taxonomy of insects, bought all the remaining cuts of my 4 manuals to use as illustrations. The only cuts I have left are those from my 6 nature books, my Indiana weed book and Butterflies and Birds of Indiana. These I would be glad to sell when I return to Indianapolis in May.”

Dr. Blatchley was a typical example of what we call the “old time naturalist.” For him the stars, the soil and rocks, the wild flowers,

trees, birds, fishes and insects held the secrets of the universe which he tried to fathom. His nature books such as *Woodland Idyls*; *My Nature Nook*; *In Days Agone*; *Boulder Reveries*, and *South America as I Saw It*, contain his philosophy of life, and are also filled with joy and satisfaction gained through a full life. We quote the following from Blatchleyana, 1930, page 16:

"For fifteen years I have been a naturalist. They have been years full of work, of hopes of ambitions. Happiest those days when I have been alone in woods and fields, when I was learning for the first time lessons from nature—lessons purer, nobler and better than I ever expect to learn from the books of man—lessons showing me the close relationship existing among all animate and inanimate things—teaching me that this world, this universe of ours, is not made up of single, isolated objects and forces, but that each object, each force is but a necessary part of one grand and perfect whole. At the end of fifteen years I am still a tyro—still learning daily new facts from the book of nature, still, and ever expect to be, a tramp naturalist. I still delight to chase the winged butterfly o'er field and pasture; draw the seine through ripple and shallow for silvery minnow and rainbow darter—climb hill and wade through pond for partridge berry or water lily, or wander all day through thicket and forest in search of hermit thrush and hooded warbler. For, as Emerson has said: "In the woods a man casts off his years as the snake his slough and at what period soever of life is always a child. In the woods is perpetual youth."

Dr. Blatchley played an important role in American Entomology and Natural History. His books will long be of value to Zoologists of the United States. The words of Edwin Markham express our feelings at his departure:—

"As when a lordly cedar green with boughs,
Goes down with a great shout upon the hills
And leaves a lonesome place against the sky."